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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000583

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DEPARTMENT FOR CA AND NEA/ARP

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TAGS: CVIS PGOV PTER PREL SA

SUBJECT: SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER ON VISA VALIDITY ISSUE

REF: RIYADH 561

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In a meeting with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal on April 6, the Ambassador raised the issue of increasing non-immigrant visa validity on a reciprocal basis.

Noting that the recent visit to the Kingdom by Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff had been a great success (reftel), the Ambassador observed that Secretary Chertoff and King Abdullah had had a very good exchange on visa policy and consular security. He added that they had agreed in particular to enhance visa security cooperation in conjunction with reform of the visa reciprocity schedule.

¶2. (C) The Foreign Minister concurred, observing that the Kingdom and the US seem to be in agreement on the essentials: granting, on a reciprocal basis, multiple-entry visas to tourists and businessmen valid for five years instead of two. For students, visa validity would be for the duration of study, with a maximum of five years. He acknowledged as well the absolute need to cooperate to detect and prevent the radicalization of Saudi students in the US. The Prince enthusiastically commented that these steps would build better relations between the two countries, adding that now is the time to act. He noted that the President's upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia would be an ideal occasion to announce agreement on these matters.

¶3. (C) COMMENT. The Foreign Minister's remarks tracked closely with the King's statements to Secretary Chertoff and the Ambassador on visa issues. It seems that the most senior level of the Saudi government is ready to agree to an amended visa reciprocity schedule and engage in heightened cooperation on visa security, specifically on radicalization.

The Saudis clearly would like to announce agreement on these issues during the President's visit. END COMMENT.

FRAKER